

## ABOUT MUSIC – By Mariss McTucker

### The Bus Driver Tour

Recorded and mixed at the Dacha by Redlight Studio, Knoxville, TN, and Muscle Shoals Sound, Muscle Shoals, AL; sound by Noel Webster, additional mixing and mastering by Scott Minor at Wild Chorus Studio; produced by The Bus Driver Tour, 2013.

The self-titled album from this fun trio, originally formed in Montana, has lots to offer. There's blues, folk, country and some rock on the 12 tunes, 11 of them originals by Danny Freund, who lives part-time in Livingston, and Ian Thomas and Paul Lee Kupfer, who hail from Knoxville, TN.

Each sings vocal lead on his compositions, and they all play various instruments, among them guitar, harmonica, bass and drums. Kupfer adds banjo as well, and guest Josh Oliver contributes lead guitar, piano and organ, and Matt Morelock plays jaw harp.

With hoppin' blues and mean and choppy harp from Morelock, they get it started with Thomas's jumper, "Poor Children." Secrets are explored in Freund's country-flavored "Good Woman"; it's flavored with great three-part harmony, as are many of the pieces. The men's voices mesh well.

Get your dancin' shoes on for Kupfer's "Digging Your Grave." Lots of percussive wizardry and low guitar chops underlie this jammin' tune about an aimless wanderer.

Kupfer frails some rollicking banjo on Thomas's "In the Morning," and Freund's little rocker, "Home," takes a traveler down South, telling us home is where he is at the moment. ("They're wakin' me up and not lettin' me sleep; reminds me I'm right where I wanna be.")

"Sweet Celeny" is a slow country finger-popper with some cool ivory-ticklin' from Oliver, bluesy and lazy; "Caroline's Blues" tells a sad, pretty love story in a rolling, minor-infused tempo.

"Shake It" is a harmonica-fueled dancer, and Freund's slow country-rocker, "New Orleans," has nuances of Glenn Frey's vocal inflections. A weary parent seeks to give her son a better life ("there's two pairs of shoes livin' under this roof, and my soul is worn through ...").

"Walking the Dog," Cliff and Tex Grimsley's bluegrass diamond, gets nifty banjo treatment, and crackling guitar riffs. This one was born for three-part harmony, and the guys nail it.

Freund's tender "Not That Old" closes out the effort. Some sweet organ joins this bittersweet number with a nicely penned chorus: "I know what it feels like to outlive your best dog's life ... I don't want souls who've grown cold ... but I don't feel that old." Thoughtful and right to the heart, this one.

All in all, a well-polished effort from this group, which is touring Montana this summer. Be sure and check out their website: [www.thebusdrivertour.com](http://www.thebusdrivertour.com).



### Mike Bader Bearjam:

#### Worldwide Blues

Recorded, engineered and mixed by Ryan "Shmedley" Maynes at Club Shmed Studios, Missoula, MT, 2013.

Veteran Missoula guitarist and bluesmeister Mike Bader gets off to a fine start here with his first album in six years. The 11 Bader-penned tunes feature stalwarts Caleb Van Gelder on drums, Stuart Garney on bass, and Josh Farmer on keys, and the fellas add backing vocals to Bader's lead singing, as well.

Bader, who picked up his love for the blues growing up in eastern Iowa near the Mississippi River, infuses his compositions with a fiercely protective love of the land, among other passions. He's spent much of his time avidly advocating for the protection of pristine places, and it rubs off in his music.

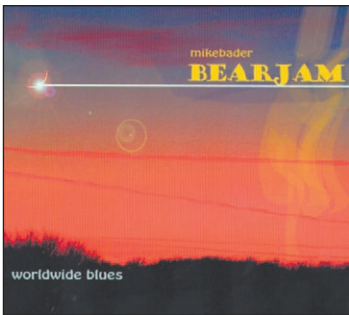
For example, the title number, "Worldwide Blues," has chunky, throaty guitar from the bluesman, wherein he bemoans the state of Mother Earth at the hands of mankind's excesses. The tune is funky and crisp, Garney gets to jam a bit on the bass, and Bader lays down some trademark meaty guitar.

On "Music's Your Best Friend," he extols the universality of the aural medium; the piece has a cool chord progression and some struttin' rhythm.

"A Stranger to Love" is funky and slow-rockin', with rappin' drums and guitar licks, jazzy and melodic; Farmer adds tasty keyboard work. Bader growls kudos to "Annabelle," channeling Chuck Berry on the flat notes during this love song to a friend's old Chevy.

Bader shows off his slide chops in "Midnite Trane," a sad and atmospheric ballad. "Steamboat Gambler" is swampy and thick with hints of Creedence Clearwater; "Spicy Lady" continues the geographic trip to Cajunville, with its terrific hip-shakin' rhythm and fiddlin' by guest artist Ellie Nuno. Van Gelder shines on this one, with his tasteful and understated percussion.

"Peace Will Come Again" starts out thoughtfully with a quiet and sweet Bader guitar solo, and his growly pipes on the simple refrain. It proceeds to get snappy and up-tempo, and clapping ensues, while Bader



shows off some George Benson-esque scatting to the guitar riff. Some hot lead fretwork on the upbeat "Find Your Own Voice" complements the song's message in fine fashion.

"Bull Trout Blues" is a hoot. Bader elaborates humorously on the need to protect watery habitats ("They mistook me for a brook trout, and they won't cut me loose" ... "My spots are yellow and my tail is square, there ain't very much of us and that ain't fair"). He proceeds to replace "brook trout" with other species in the chorus, but the lesson remains the same.

Bader finds innovative ways to work his passions into his music, which all artists strive to do. Fine production work rounds out the effort. Visit [reverbnation.com/mikebaderbearjam](http://reverbnation.com/mikebaderbearjam).

### Richie Reinholdt: *Pleasure Madness*

Recorded and produced by Richie Reinholdt at animaltown studios, Missoula, MT, 2012.

Missoula songwriter Richie Reinholdt has a new one out, his 10 originals ornamented by a host of local Missoula talents. But wait — he plays a bunch of instruments, too: guitars, bass, banjo and mandolin, to go along with his lead vocal.

Abe Baruck, Bruce Threlkeld and Ryan Vetos add drums, and Larry Chung and David Horgan play pedal steel guitar. Don't forget Andy Dunnigan on resophonic guitar, nor Britt Arnesen, his bandmate in "Britchy," who provides harmony vocals. Quite the orchestra.

Chung's cool pedal steel break helps out on "Court Jester"; "Breaking My Heart" is a gentle shuffle with Horgan on steel. Arnesen's harmony vocalizations are perfectly suited to Reinholdt's warbly tenor on many of the tunes; witness the pretty chorus and 60's pop-sensibility in "Hollywood."

Reinholdt sings both lead and harmony vocals on his lonesome "Night Train," following up on his Everly Brothers influence. He adds a spooky guitar break here as well.

"Fly Away" has an early Beatles' sound with that garage-band authenticity, and "Blue #2," written with Arnesen, is a nice belt-buckle shiner. "Six Strings," with its Bob Wills touch, begs the feet to dance as well, thanks to some toe-tappin' drums from Jeff "Dukey" Kirschenmann.

The album is armed with Reinholdt's usual precision production work. Visit [richiereinholdt.bandcamp.com](http://richiereinholdt.bandcamp.com).



### John Lowell: *I Am Going to the West*

Recorded, mixed, and mastered by Fred Baker at Electric Peak Recording, Gardiner, MT; produced by John Lowell and Fred Baker, 2012.

Livingston songwriter/guitarist John Lowell, a Montana legend, has created a terrific solo project with his umpteenth album. He's resided here for oodles of years and played in lots of bands, most recently with the Two Bit Franks and Growling Old Men, a duo with mandolin player Ben Winship.

He's performed on "A Prairie Home Companion" and been featured on the cover of *β*. Lowell says, "I've been compared to some of the finest guitarists around, and I've been compared to a ham sandwich." C'mon John, blow your horn a little! It's worth it.

Lowell has a flare for tight storytelling in his soft, slightly nasal baritone. His melodic ideas seem familiar, yet they come from somewhere new. His trademark guitar style is evident on this collection of his and others' pieces and traditional material, spanning the bluegrass-folk realm. His only accompaniment is his smooth and spectacular fretwork, except on the title song.

The first tune, "Waterbound," is a quick bluegrassier; it features a slurry of bent notes, hammer-ons and pull-offs, and delayed tags that are right out of the Lowell playbook. The guy breathes the lexicon!

There are wistful waltzes and tunes about girls, "Sarah Hogan" and "Laura Foster." The latter "sweetheart murder ballad" retells the Tom Dooley saga, replete with mesmerizing guitar breaks.

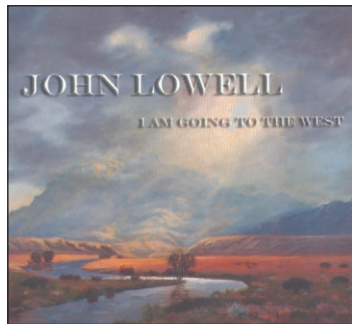
"Buffalo Skinners" finds Lowell doing his usual — incorporating the coolest licks into a melody instrumental. Here he walks up the fretboard in dissonant and spooky fashion. Ooh, I like it! His "Rhythm of the Wheels" has a man leaving a dead-end town on the train; it's a folk tune, but, by golly, you can jitterbug to it.

Lowell gets bluesy on "Mama Don't Like It," a song about a moonshine runner. "It don't matter about my alibi, she's got a pan in her fist, blood in her eye," he sings.

The title tune comes last. It's the only one with other musicians, featuring Chris Cundy on piano, Leo McCann on the low whistle, and harmony vocals by Tom Murphy and Julie Elkins. One of a few pensive pieces here, it's the tale of a man leaving his homeland and loved ones behind for the vast frontier, echoing the loneliness many faced moving westward a century or so ago.

Sporting excellent production values, this CD will appeal to fans and the uninitiated alike. Lowell is in demand in national music meccas but chooses to live and ply his craft in Big Sky Country. And we are so very fortunate for that.

Visit the artist at [www.johnlowell.com](http://www.johnlowell.com).



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## State of the Arts welcomes CDs

*State of the Arts* welcomes CD submissions by Montana musicians for inclusion in the About Music section. The recordings must be professional, commercially available, full-length CDs, with cover art and liner notes. Brief biographical information on band members would be helpful to the writer.

Please send submissions to either the Montana Arts Council, PO Box 202201, Helena, MT, 59620; or *Lively Times*, 33651 Eagle Pass Trl., Charlo, MT 59824.